

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

Claims 1-10 (canceled).

Claim 11 (new): A binding device comprising:

binding rings;

a holding member having a length that enables the binding rings to be arranged at a distance from one another; and

an operating member movably fixed inside the holding member such that respective bases of the binding rings are secured onto a surface of the operating member at a desired distance so as to secure the binding rings to the holding member; wherein

the operating member includes a pair of operating pieces which move within the holding member in a longitudinal direction of the holding member;

the base of one of the binding rings is secured to one of the pair of operating pieces, and the base of another of the binding rings is secured to the other of the pair of operating pieces;

the pair of operating pieces are fixed to the holding member such that abutting edges thereof are maintained in an abutting state at a location spaced from an inner surface of the holding member when the binding rings are closed, and the abutting edges are maintained at a location closer to the inner surface of the holding member when the binding rings are opened than the location of the abutting edges when the binder rings are closed; and

an opening/closing member arranged to shift the binding rings in an opening direction such that the operating pieces are moved in the longitudinal direction of the holding member within the holding member and are maintained at the location closer to the inner surface of the holding member when the binding rings are opened.

Claim 12 (new): The binding device according to claim 11, wherein the holding member includes holding walls that extend in a direction that is substantially parallel to the longitudinal direction of the holding member, and the operating member includes outer edges that slide inside the holding walls.

Claim 13 (new): The binding device according to claim 12, wherein the operating member includes a pair of operating pieces that slide within the holding member in the longitudinal direction of the holding member, the pair of operating pieces include outer edges that slide in the longitudinal direction of the holding member and abutting edges that enable the pair of operating pieces to abut against each other on inner edges parallel to the outer edges.

Claim 14 (new): The binding device according to claim 11, wherein the opening/closing member is made of an elastic member, and the elastic member is provided between a pair of operating pieces defining the operating member and arranged to diagonally cross a direction connecting the bases of the binding rings secured to the operating pieces at a distance so as to move the pair of operating pieces in directions opposite to each other and to maintain an opened/closed state of the binding rings.

Claim 15 (new): The binding device according to claim 14, wherein the elastic member is arranged to bridge between the pair of operating pieces defining the operating member such that one end of the elastic member is fixed to one of the operating pieces and the other end thereof is fixed to the other operating piece.

Claim 16 (new): The binding device according to claim 14, wherein the elastic member is arranged to bridge between the pair of operating pieces defining the operating member such that one end of the elastic member is fixed to a surface of one of the operating pieces, the surface being opposite to a surface where the bases of the

binding rings are fixed and the other end thereof is fixed to a surface of the other operating piece, the surface being opposite to the surface where the bases of the binding rings are fixed.

Claim 17 (new): The binding device according to claim 14, wherein one end of the elastic member is fixed to one of the operating pieces defining the operating member, and the other end thereof is fixed to the holding member across the other operating piece defining the operating member.

Claim 18 (new): The binding device according to claim 11, wherein the holding member includes holding walls extending in a direction parallel to the longitudinal direction of the holding member, the opening/closing member is made of an elastic member extending in the longitudinal direction, one end of the opening/closing member is fixed to an inner side of one of the holding walls of the holding member, and the other end of the opening/closing member is fixed to an inner side of the other holding wall facing the holding wall of the holding member at a distance in the longitudinal direction of the holding member, the opening/closing member further extends so as to cross the one operating piece fixed to the one holding wall side to reach the other operating piece abutting against the one operating piece to be retained thereby and then from a position retained by the one operating piece across an abutting portion between the pair of operating pieces to the other operating piece so as to be retained by the other operating piece.

Claim 19 (new): The binding device according to claim 18, wherein one end of the opening/closing member is fixed to a first fixing portion on an inner side of a first holding wall of one of the holding walls of the holding member, and the other end of the opening/closing member is fixed to a second fixing portion on an inner side of a second holding wall of the other of the holding walls facing and substantially parallel to the first holding wall of the holding member at an equal distance from a center of the operating pieces in a longitudinal direction to that from the center to the first fixing portion, the

opening/closing member further extends across a first operating piece of one of the operating pieces in an approximately rectangular shape fixed to the one holding wall side to a second operating piece of the other of the operating pieces abutting against the first operating piece so as to be retained by a fourth fixing portion of the second operating piece so as to be slightly shifted from a line passing through the first fixing portion to perpendicularly cross a moving direction of the second operating piece in the moving direction of the second operating piece when a first binding ring and a second binding ring of the binding rings are disengaged, and the opening/closing member further extends from the fourth fixing portion to the first operating piece across longitudinal abutting edges between the first operating piece and the second operating piece to be retained by a third fixing portion of the first operating piece so as to be slightly shifted from a line passing through the second fixing portion to perpendicularly cross a moving direction of the first operating piece in the moving direction of the first operating piece when the first binding ring and the second binding ring are disengaged, thereby the opening/closing member has an approximately Z shape.

Claim 20 (new): The binding device according to claim 14, wherein the elastic member is one of a coil spring, a torsion spring, a flat spring, an elongated rubber, and an elongated urethane rubber.

Claim 21 (new): The binding device according to claim 18, wherein the elastic member is one of a coil spring, a torsion spring, a flat spring, an elongated rubber, and an elongated urethane rubber.